

## INTERTEXTUALITY AND HYPERTEXTUALITY IN ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

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### ABSTRACT

The central argument of this paper is that the latest generation of women writers challenges the stereotypical female intimacy novels. Like the forefathers of African literature, women writers are producing political comments. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's coming of age novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, allegorically documents Nigeria's political history in the late nineties, which accounts for the relevance of women's struggle. In this article, two of Gérard Genette's key intertextual relations – intertextuality and hypertextuality- call to mind the changes in women's writing.

**KEYWORDS:** Intersexuality, hypertextuality, political Comments, Women's Struggle

### INTRODUCTION

Originally, the concept of intertextuality can be traced back to the Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism. Julia Kristeva, in the sixties, renamed Bakhtin's dialogism intertextuality because, as she says; "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *Intertextuality* replaces that of in tersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*."<sup>1</sup> Kristeva's magical word inspired many other narrative theorists like the French structuralist, Gérard Genette. In his prolific book, *Palimpsestes: La Littérature au Second Degré*, Genette renders a clearer explanation of his concept of 'transtextualité' ou 'transcendence textuelle.' According to him, 'transtextualité' is: « tout ce qui le[texte littéraire] met en relation manifeste ou secrète, avec d'autres textes. » (Genette, 1982 : 7).

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, born in the late seventies and an acclaimed writer of the latest generation, rightly, says during an interview: "Many of the stories we tell have already been told. It is the freshness we bring to the re-telling that matters."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, notwithstanding the generational differences and challenges, all generations of writers are closely knit. Adichie, during another interview quoted in J. Roger Kurtz's "The Intertextual Imagination in *Purple Hibiscus*", says: "I like to think of Achebe as the writer whose work gave me permission to write my own stories." (Kurtz, 2012:23).

Gérard Genette's transtextuality is made up of five key intertextual relations including intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality and architextuality. In this article, I apply two of his key intertextual relations, intertextuality and hypertextuality, to Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. The main objective of this paper is to call to mind the changes in women's writing. The latest generation of women writers challenges the stereotypical female intimacy novels. Like the forefathers of African literature, women writers are producing political comments. In this paper, I pinpoint, on the one hand, all references to Nigeria inserted in the fabric of this novel. On the other hand, I explore the close relationship

<sup>1</sup> Kristeva, Julia. (1986), *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi, Columbia University Press, New York, p.37

<sup>2</sup> Molara, Wood, (2006), Sefi Atta interview... & Adichie published in a blog named *The Writings of a general Wordsbody*, Saturday, May 13, 2006. Lagos, Nigeria.

between Adichie's debut and coming of age novel *Purple Hibiscus* and her literary father late Chinua Achebe's and other African writers' works.

### Intertextuality

According to Genette, intertextuality is « coprésence entre deux ou plusieurs textes, c'est-à-dire, eidétiquement et le plus souvent, par la présence effective d'un texte dans un autre. » (Genette, 1982 :8). More explicitly, Genette says, « L'intertextualité est (...) le mécanisme propre à la lecture littéraire. Elle seule, en effet, produit la signification, alors que la lecture linéaire, commune aux textes littéraire et non littéraire, ne produit que le sens. » Genette, 1982 :8). In this paper, the relationship between the text and the history of the society is of great significance. It is a common truism that literature has been at the forefront of the struggle for independence. In this vein, any literary text reflects implicitly or explicitly many social and political crises of the society in which it is published. Uzoechi Nwagbara, in his article, "Intertextuality and the Truth of Achebe's Fiction: Militarised Nigeria Postcolony in *Anthills of the Savannah*", opines that the relationship amongst texts and the dialogue such texts address brings to the fore the ideological coloration of a particular epoch or time. Therefore, every text or literary work is derived from the ideological or politico-social realities of a particular time in the history of a people. (Nwagbara, 2012: 2). Still, in the same article, Nwagbara provides a clearer explanation of this concept:

Intersexuality ensconces that no text is an island. In maintaining that there is no isolated text, rather every text is derived from a pool of textual relations, intertextuality reverses the structuralist contention that a text can only be influenced by its antecedents and has no destination. Therefore, in the poststructuralist schema, older text can be filtered through later texts – thereby foregrounding the endless stream of interconnectivity of textual tissues, cultures, ideologies and mores, among others. (Nwagbara, 2012:2).

This is specifically true about Adichie's debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, a *Bildungsroman* in which she allegorically retraced the postcolonial Nigeria's political history in the nineties. Her protagonist-narrator, Kambili's family's progressive passage from innocence to maturity is that of Nigeria's progressive recovery from military dictatorship. Fredric Jameson in his 1986's article, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", rightly confirms Nwagbara's view:

All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories.... Third-world texts, even those which seemingly are private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*. (Jameson, 1986:69)

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie, first, projects into the reader's mind the necessity for the African masses to gain freedom from old and outdated political systems. Second, Adichie is calling for women's awareness and readiness to dismantle all social and political structures that curtail their empowerment. Because of her characters' thirst and quest for freedom, Adichie's clear allusion to some slave narratives in the novel is outstanding. In fact, allusion is one of the forms of Genette's first intertextual relation of transtextuality, intertextuality. He describes it as follows:

Sous sa forme la plus explicite et la plus littérale, c'est la pratique traditionnelle de la *citation* (avec guillemets, avec ou sans référence précise) ; sous une forme moins explicite et moins canonique, celle du *plagiat*, qui est un emprunt non déclaré, mais encore littéral ; sous forme encore moins explicite et moins littérale, celle de

*l'allusion...* (Genette, 1982:8)

In a word, Genette's intertextuality consists of quotation, plagiarism, and allusion. These latter provide a pragmatic and determinable intertextual relationship among specific elements of individual texts. In this section, only allusions must be analysed in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Allusion, according to Genette, is « un énoncé dont la pleine intelligence suppose la perception d'un rapport entre lui et un autre auquel renvoie nécessairement telle ou telle de ses inflexions » (Genette, 1982 :8). More explicitly, M. H. Abrams (1999) defines allusion as a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event or to another literary work or passage.<sup>3</sup>

### Literary and Religious References

In this paper, allusions and references are used as synonyms because both words have almost the same meaning. In the tradition of intertextualité, 'référence', as Piegay-Gros quoted by Roger Tro Deho writes, "consiste pour l'écrivain, à renvoyer son lecteur à un autre texte sans le convoquer littéralement. Comme la citation, la référence est une forme explicite d'intertextualité ; à la différence que la référence n'expose pas le texte auquel elle renvoie. C'est plutôt *une relation in absentia* qu'elle établit." (Deho, 2005: 103). Adichie associates some literary and religious references with some characters to emphasise their educational standards as well as their biblical inclinations. In other words, Adichie uses them to denounce the purpose of evangelization in former African colonies.

It is as Adichie points out in her speech 'The Danger of a Single Story', a practice among the African intellectuals to connect their children to the world through cartoons and early reading of British and American children's books: "I was an early reader. And what I read were British and American children's books.... I loved those American and British books I read. They stirred my imagination. They opened up new worlds for me..."<sup>4</sup> In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili discovers powerful former slave narratives like Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* and Equiano Olaudah's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, in Nsukka where change starts. A slave narrative, an American literary genre, is an autobiographical account of life as a slave. Not only is it written to expose the horrors of human bondage but it also documents a slave's experiences from his or her own point of view. Adichie's reference to these slave narratives denotes the striking relationships between autobiographies and the *Bildungsroman*.

Traditionally, the *Bildungsroman*, is a novel of formation in which a male hero rebels against the gender expectation of his society and seeks freedom in another one. Irele F. Abiola in his prolific book entitled *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel* notes that there are considerable correspondences and convergences between the two genres in terms of context, content and form. In this paper, only the similarities (correspondences) must be taken into account. According to Abiola:

An autobiography refers to an account...retrospectively documenting the life of a real person who serves as both narrator and protagonist.... At the same time, even though *Bildungsroman* – like any work of art – normatively eschews literal truth claims, it nevertheless makes, under the guise of fiction, large truth claims about specific historical, political, and cultural contexts.... Since an autobiography typically records the author's growth or formation, it may be said to represent a kind of *Bildungsroman*. (Abiola, 2010: 195-196)

<sup>3</sup> Abrams, M. H., (1999), *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Seventh Edition, Heinle & Heinle, Massachusetts, p.9

<sup>4</sup> Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "The Danger of a Single Story." Courtesy of TED

These correspondences are to be read as a signpost for the rebirth of nationalist struggle in post independent disillusioned African countries. Autobiographies and *Bildungsroman* participate in the same conversations regarding the fundamental nature of African societies in the wake of the encounter with colonialism. Both genres have played important roles in the development of African literature as the continent struggles for independence from European colonial powers and then against the crisis constituted by colonialism's oppressive legacies in postcolonial nation states, characterized by fundamental contradictions, inequalities, and dependencies (Abiola, 2010: 196).

Nsukka is indeed a university center, a place where forward-thinking, progressive characters are located. For Adichie, Kambili's aunt, Aunty Ifeoma and her family in Nsukka represent the ideological training of the weaker to dismantle the oppressors. Purposefully, the narrator associates the discovery of these autobiographies with this authentic intellectual location, Nsukka, and a timid and oppressed female character, Kambili. The following flashback underscores the role Nsukka plays in Eugene's family's perseverance and determination as Kambili says:

I lay in bed after Mama left and let my mind rake through the past, through the years when Jaja and Mama and I spoke more with our spirits than our lips. Until Nsukka. Nsukka started it all. Aunty Ifeoma's little garden next to the verandah on her flat in Nsukka began to lift the silence. (Adichie, 2003:15)

Like Douglass and Vassa, Kambili, Beatrice, Jaja, Sisi as well as the African masses should commit themselves to winning their rights to freedom of speech and mobility. The narrator's reference to Douglass and Vassa's autobiographies aims at showing that the power of freedom lies in each oppressed person's hand. Just as Phillip Wendell wrote to Frederick Douglass in the preface of his autobiography,

I was glad to learn, in your story, how early the most neglected of God's children waken to sense of their rights, and of the injustice done to them. Experience is a keen teacher; and long before you had mastered your A, B, C or knew where the "white sails" of the Chesapeake were bound, you began, I see, to gauge the wretchedness of the slave, not by his hunger, not by his lashes and toil, but by the cruel and the blighting death which gathers over his soul. (Douglass, 1845: xvi)

Similar to the slave narrative, religion also is known to have played a key role in the Black American emancipation movements. By religion, I am making allusion to Christianity's intrusion in Africa. In former African colonies, Christianity was used to discourage any form of rebellion against the colonial empire. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the narrator's reference to deuterocanonical books (Esther, Judith, Tobit, Maccabees (one and two), Wisdom, Sirach and Baruch) aims at pointing forth the process of Africans' indoctrination. In fact, these books raise a lot of controversies between Catholics and Protestants. While the Protestants removed the Deuterocanonical books – they called them the apocryphal books - from the Bible saying they were not the word of God, the Catholics and the Orthodox kept them as part of their Holy Bible because they are about Christians' laws and taboos. Symbolically, taboos have never favoured any form of development. Rather, taboos slow down people's emancipation. It is then understandable that African countries are still trekking feet unable to find the right solution to their social problems. It is unfortunate that Africans do not make a clear demarcation between God's words and evangelisation policies. Kambili's pain is visible when she says: "He [Eugene] was flipping through the Bible, the Catholic version with the deuterocanonical books, bound in shiny black leather" (Adichie, 2003: 60).

Adichie contends that Africans' indoctrination functions as an organized institution since it lays the foundation of

all social bodies like education. In this regards, the selection and choice of Saint Matthew's gospel is done intentionally: "Matthew chapter five up to verse eleven" (Adichie, 2003:48). In the New Testament, Matthew 5 is known as the "The Sermon on the Mount; The Beatitudes." It is stated clearly in Zaine Ridling's 1989's edition of the Bible:

<sup>1</sup>When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup>Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: <sup>3</sup>"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. <sup>5</sup>"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup>"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. <sup>7</sup>"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. <sup>8</sup>"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. <sup>9</sup>"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. <sup>10</sup>"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup>"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.<sup>5</sup>

Seeing that Nigeria is a former British colony, the narrator's reference to it aims at criticizing African youth's brainwashing. It is in line with this that the narrator-protagonist, Kambili, makes an allusion to one of the oldest epistles in the New Testament; James' letter. Indeed, James is a relative of Jesus Christ usually called "brother of the Lord". He was the leader of the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem whom Paul acknowledged as one of the "pillars". More precisely, Kambili is reading James chapter five which is actually about the anointing of the sick: "I was in my room after lunch, reading James chapter five because I would talk about the biblical roots of the anointing of the sick during family time, when I heard the sounds. Swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand-carved bedroom..." (Adichie, 2003:32). This denotes a malaise in their house and the Nigerian nation as a whole. In fact, the anointing of the sick, one of the seven Sacraments of the New Testament, was instituted by Jesus Christ himself. This Sacrament was recommended and promulgated to the faithful by James in his epistle. James' epistle basic message is an urgent appeal for those who call themselves Christians to adopt a courageous faith that will help them cope effectively with the trials of life, and will produce in them heightened moral integrity and loving actions.<sup>6</sup> Ironically, Adichie mentions James Five to denounce Christian leaders' hypocritical attitudes. Still in Ridling's edition of the Bible, James Five can be read as follows:

<sup>14</sup>Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. (James 5: 14-15)<sup>7</sup>

Simply put, Adichie censures the repressive teachings of the Roman Catholic church because they have turned Eugene, a typical African leader, into a brutal and heartless person. For the sake of piety, Eugene terrorizes his family members psychologically and physically.

Adichie documents the misinterpretation of other Sacraments like the 'Extreme Unction,' which may also and more fittingly be called 'Anointing of the Sick. Contrary to the common assumption, the Extreme Unction is not a sacrament for only those who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as anyone of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the appropriate time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived. The

<sup>5</sup> Ridling, Zaine., (1989), *The Bible with The Apocryphal/ Deuterocanonical Books*, New Revised Standard Edition, Division of Christian Education, USA, p.17

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.493

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.501-502

person is to be anointed on the following parts of his/her body: on the eyes for the sight, on the ears for hearing, on the nostrils for smell, on the mouth for taste or speech, on the hands for touch, on the feet for walking, on the loins for the pleasure that abides there. Adichie finds it deplorable that this sacrament is wrongly administered in African countries just for the sake of keeping these people in an everlasting bondage. For example, Eugene requests Father Benedict to give his daughter an extreme unction whose rib he has broken for having beaten her severely: "Father Benedict stood above me. He was making the sign of the cross on my feet with oil; the oil smelled like onion..." (Adichie, 2003: 212). In fact, Kambili meets none of the criteria to be given this sacrament. She is neither in danger from sickness nor old age. The truth is that those who are aware of the right use of this sacrament cannot speak out because they are members of the oppressed group like Kambili's mother; Beatrice. Rightly, Kambili's surprise is visible as we are told: "It does not mean anything. They give extreme unction to anyone who is seriously ill", Mama whispered, when Papa and Father Benedict left. I stared at the movements of her lips. I was not seriously ill. She knew that. Why was she saying I was seriously ill..." (Adichie, 2003:212). Father Benedict's acceptance of this ritual is part of the Roman Catholic Church's policy to ingrain in Africans' mind a false usage of sacraments and mislead African people. In a nutshell, Adichie seems to say African leaders do not use the adequate medication because they have not yet diagnosed the actual diseases they are suffering from. They often use strong medicines to heal common diseases, which is unfortunate.

Literally, Kambili is translated into English as "Let me be" or "let me choose my life."<sup>8</sup> Through Kambili, Adichie is making a swift call to former imperialists, that is to say, it is time Africans chose their own development policies. These Scriptures, on the one hand, consistently devalue traditional Igbo culture and experience. On the other hand, Africans are made aware that being persecuted by the Europeans is the only way to gain access to the Kingdom of Heaven. As a result, some scholars even proclaim that Christianity is the sole agent of Africa's present state. Indeed, the first African intellectuals were trained by missionaries and the majority of them was forced to renounce their religions and disregarded their mother tongues. That is the reason why the narrator mockingly describes Father Benedict's articulation of the word, native: "... and when he said native his straight-line lips turned down at the corners to form an inverted U." (Adichie, 2003:4).

A direct consequence of this disdain for African practices is the open war to African languages. In the opening of the novel the protagonist-narrator, Kambili, introduces the reader to Father Benedict's Mass celebration. Similar to some of the first missionaries Father Benedict looks down on African languages and religions. Through this episode Adichie is pointing out earlier missionaries' responsibilities in the loss of African values and how European languages constitute a threat to African languages. For example, Kyrie used to ask for forgiveness and Credo for the profession of faith are so important in a Mass that it would be sinful to say them in African languages. It is as if that African languages may ruin the solemnity of a Mass. Adichie finds it unbelievable that Father Benedict forbids the use of African languages to chant Kyrie and Credo as Kambili says overtly: "Father Benedict has changed things in the parish, such as insisting the Credo and Kyrie be recited only in Latin; Igbo was not acceptable.... But he allowed offertory songs in Igbo: he called them native songs..." (Adichie, 2003: 4). In other words, the present state of African countries stems, on the one hand, from the imperialist interpretation and usage of the Bible and is, on the other hand, the product of African's unwillingness to elaborate cultural policies.

<sup>8</sup> Greene, Andrée, (2007), "On the New Generation of Nigerian Writers", Boston Review, p.1. Available on <http://bostonreview.net/BR32.2/greene.php>

## Characters and Events

Although writers pretend to create fictional characters, some of them are representations of real people in fiction. Gérard Genette's paratextuality, more specifically the epitext (interviews, speeches...) helps the readers identify and unmask the fictional characters. Adichie delineates implicitly many Nigerian political figures in *Purple Hibiscus*. Surprisingly, only male leaders are mentioned to denounce the extreme masculinization of the political sphere. For Adichie, another plausible explanation of women's absence in this domain is that women are not power drunk.

Sani Abacha is known as Big Oga in *Purple Hibiscus*. In the same novel, Ade Coker is a fictional representation of the editor of New Watch Magazine, Dele Giwa. He was an uncorrupt editor under Babaginda and was killed by a bomb parcel. Adichie successfully slides this information in her novel. She attempts to emphasize both the ban on the press freedom in Nigeria since Buhari's regime and cruelty as a distinctiveness of any military regime. Adeyinka Adeyemi (1995) wrote in his article entitled, "The Nigerian Press under the Military: Persecution, Resilience and Political Crisis (1983-1993)", "Dele Giwa was detained for one week in 1983 for publishing what the police called "classified material". (Adeyemi, 1995:16). Similarly, Ade Coker is arrested as Kambili is told by her brother Jaja:

He told me soldiers had arrested Ade Coker as he drove out of the editorial offices of the Standard. His car was abandoned on the roadside, the front door left open.... His arrest was because of the big cover story in the last Standard about how the Head of State and his wife had paid people to transport heroin abroad, a story that questioned the recent execution of three men and who the real drug barons were. (Adichie, 2003:38)

The classical material is translated here as 'Drug'. This is a codifying language. The corrupt government plans his murder and succeeds. Later, he was killed heartlessly as Adeyinka Adeyemi mentioned:

The day before the mail bomb was brought to Giwa's residence, the director of Military Intelligence, Col. Halilu Akilu, telephoned Giwa's wife and asked: "Where is the place you stay? What is the address?" The day after Giwa was killed, on that Sunday morning, a thick envelope was delivered by a messenger to Dele Giwa while he was having breakfast at home in the company of a colleague. "Lettering on the package said it was from the office of the C-in-C (commander in chief) and that it was to be opened only by Giwa." Believing the mail was from the President, Giwa opened it. It was a mail bomb. It exploded in his lap severing his thighs and killing him one hour later. (Adeyemi, 1995:11)

Dele Giwa's death and that of the editor of the *Standard* in *Purple Hibiscus* are similar. Just like Giwa, Coker has denounced Big Oga's cabinet members' implication in a similar business:

Ade Coker was at breakfast with his family when a courier delivered a package to him. His daughter, in her primary school uniform, was sitting across the table from him. The baby was nearby, in a high chair. His wife was spooning Cerelac into the baby's mouth. Ade Coker was blown up when he opened the package- a package everybody would have known was from the Head of State even if his wife Yewande had not said that Ade Coker looked at the envelope and said "it has the State House seal before he opened it. (Adichie, 2003:206)

During the reign of Abacha, Ken Saro-Wiwa, a famous freedom fighter and writer, was assassinated cruelly. He was executed along with other human rights activists and Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth of Nations. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Ken Saro-Wiwa comes under the name Nwankiti Ogechi because his execution causes tremendous political sanctions like that of Saro-Wiwa as Kambili says: "...we heard on the radio that Nigeria had been suspended from



the Commonwealth because of the murder, that Canada and Holland were recalling their ambassadors in protest. The newscaster read a small portion of the press release from the Canadian government, which referred to Kwankiti Ogechi as a “man of honor.” (Adichie, 2003:201)

Similar to Saro Wiwa, Nwankiti is known for his activism and his fight for democracy because he rallies himself to the pro-democracy. The whole story of the execution was not much detailed as it can be read: “Nwankiti disappeared without a trace.... Where is Nwankiti?” (Adichie, 2003: 200). About the next edition of the *Standard*, Kambili says “I knew it would have Nwankiti Ogechi on its cover. The story was detailed, angry.... Soldiers shot Nwankiti Ogechi in a bush in Minna. And then they poured acid on his body to melt his flesh off his bones, to kill him even when he was already dead.” (Adichie, 2003:200-201).

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Big Oga and Eugene died simultaneously. In Nigeria, at the same time, Gen. Sani Abacha died on top of a prostitute on June 8 and Chief Moshood Abiola died of a fatal heart attack on July 7, 1998.<sup>9</sup> Moshood Abiola is a wealthy business man and owner of the nation's largest independent media house in Nigeria, the *Concord Group* whose editorial is very hot. Widespread riots break out in response to the death of Abiola and an autopsy was made by Dr. James Young, a cardiac pathologist. He reaffirmed that Abiola died of natural causes, of long standing disease of the heart, of a type and severity that can cause unexpected death.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene, Kambili's father, is a wealthy businessman and owner of a newspaper the editorial of which is very hot as Kambili points out: “The *Standard* had written many stories about the cabinet ministers who stashed money in foreign bank accounts, money meant for paying teachers and building roads... Only the *Standard* had a critical editorial, calling on the new government to quickly implement a return to democracy plan.” (Adichie, 2003:24-25). Further, the narrator said that the “*Standard* wrote about the value of freedom, about how his pen would not, could not, stop writing the truth.” (Adichie, 2003:42). This is an evidence that *The Standard* is the fictional name of *The Concord Group*.

Under Abacha, Decree 48 was issued on August 16 to proscribe *Concord Group* of publications. In the same vein, the *Standard* is going to publish underground because it is no longer safer for the staff. (Adichie, 2003:43). Eugene Achike, Kambili's father's death calls for protests: “Especially with the democracy groups demonstrating, calling for a government investigation into Papa's death, insisting that the old regime killed him.” (Adichie, 2003:297). Previously, an autopsy has also been done and the report reaffirms that he is poisoned. Henceforth, I may draw some conclusions about the actual identity of the owner of the *Standard*, Eugene Achike is Moshood Abiola even though Eugene is an Igbo and Abiola is Yoruba.

In pre-colonial Nigeria, a former slave successfully established himself as a powerful and wealthy man: Jaja of Oppobo. Adichie fictionalizes him under the same name in *Purple Hibiscus*. Purposefully, he creates him as a defiant son to dismantle his father's excessive authority. Similar to Jaja, Eugene's son defies his father's authority and emerges as a strong figure in his family and society as well. Ifeoma retells the story of King Jaja: “He was the king of the Oppobo people”. Auntie Ifeoma said and when the British came, he refused to let them control all the trade. He did not sell his soul for a bit of gunpowder like the other kings did, so the British exiled him to the West Indies. He never returned to Oppobo”

<sup>9</sup> Enemaku, Idachaba. “Chronology of Major Political Events in the Abacha Era (1993-1998)”, p.349-350 available on <http://books.openedition.org/ifra/653?lang=fr>:

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.350



(Adichie, 2003:144).

In the late sixties, Nigeria witnessed a series of bloody military coups that fueled the rise of ethnic rivalries and tribalism. Eugene Achike is very critical of this vicious cycle of coups as Kambili says:

He [Eugene] looked sad; his rectangular lips seemed to sag. Coups begat coups, he said, telling us the bloody coups of the sixties, which ended in civil war just after he left Nigeria to study in England. A coup always began a vicious cycle. Military men would always overthrow one another, because they could, because they were all power drunk.” (Adichie, 2003:24)

By bloody coups of the sixties, Eugene is making an allusion to the series of military coups that led to the Biafra war. In fact, Eugene recounts his children this part of their national history because there is another coup: “Papa had just checkmated Jaja when we heard the martial music on the radio; the solemn strains making us stop to listen. A general with a strong Hausa accent came on and announced that there had been a coup and that we had a new government. We should be told shortly who our new head of state was.” (Adichie, 2003: 24). This is, indeed, about Abacha’s taking over of the power although people are commonly told that Chief Ernest Shonekan resigned.

Under Abacha’s governance, there was a series of riots because the Head of State makes life unbearable for his citizens. There were some riots throughout the country and a call for a general strike in solidarity with the oil workers. Auntie Ifeoma and her daughter Amaka make allusions to these events in her novel: “I really hope fuel comes in the next week, otherwise when we resume, I will have to walk to my lectures.” (Adichie, 2003:128); “There was no light and no water for a month” (Adichie, 2003:131), “The traders say it is hard to transport their food because there is no fuel, so they add on the costs of transportation, *o di egwu*,” (Adichie, 2003:171). Amaka blames the doctors for her grandfather would have not died if they had not been on strike.

Under Big Oga (Abacha) there has been an increase in the process of the opponents’ elimination. They were shot down in a terrorist’s style. For example, the narrator mentions some of the bomb blasts that target opponents: “Remember the bomb blast at the airport when a civil rights lawyer was travelling. Remember the one at the stadium during the pro-democracy meeting Remember the man shot in his bedroom by men wearing black masks” (Adichie, 2003:201). The narrator is referring to the following bomb blasts under Abacha:

**May 31, 1995:** Bomb blast at the launching of the Family Support Programme (FSP) at the Ilorin Stadium kills two.

**January 19, 1996:** Bomb explodes at Malam Aminu Kano Airport, Kano.

**February 2, 1996:** Alex Ibru, publisher of *The Guardian* titles and Abacha’s first Minister of Internal Affairs is shot and wounded by gunmen suspected to be hired assassins.<sup>11</sup>

## HYPERTEXTUALITY IN *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

Hypertextuality is the fourth intertextual relation of Genette’s transtextuality. It represents the relation between a text and a text or genre on which it is based but which it transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends. In his 1982’s *Palimpsestes : La Littérature au Second Degré*, Genette wrote : « J’avais même d’abord envisagé de restreindre l’enquête

<sup>11</sup> Enemaku, Idachaba. op.cit. p346-347

aux seuls genres officiellement hypertextuels comme la parodie, le travestissement, le pastiche. » (Genette, 1982: 16) In this study, only parody is going to be discussed.

Etymologically, parody hails from two Greek words: *para* meaning ‘besides’, ‘along with’, or subsidiary and *ody* meaning ‘song’. In ancient Greek literature, parody is a type of poem that imitated another poem’s style.<sup>12</sup> For Gérard Genette, in the context of a literary text, parody is a transformation of a text as he states it:

*parôdia* serait le fait de chanter à côté... ou encore de chanter dans un autre ton: déformer, donc, ou *transposer une mélodie*... en intervenant cette fois sur le texte lui-même, le récitant peut, au prix de quelques modifications minimales (minimales), le détourner vers un autre objet et lui donner une autre signification.... Plus largement encore, la *transposition* d’un texte épique pourrait consister en une modification stylistique qui le transporterait, par exemple, du registre noble qui est le sien dans un registre plus familier, voire vulgaire (Genette, 1982 : 17-18)

For instance, Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* is a parody of late Chinua Achebe’s novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *The River Between* and a biblical event Palm Sunday. Such an adaptation to former literary or religious texts aims at disavowing tyranny. In other words, no production is of purely a new creation; it necessarily borrows some words or events from previous works. Characterisation, the plot, and the thematic concerns help Adichie bring out her connection to the forefathers of African literature.

### Adichie, Achebe and Thiong’O

Although Adichie is very young, she buys much from the literary traditions of her forefathers like Achebe, Thiong’o among others. In her speech, “The Danger of a Single Story”, Adichie recognizes that some writers like Achebe have changed her vision of African literature as she says: “But because of writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye I went through a mental shift in my perception of African literature.”<sup>13</sup> It is then understandable that her debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, borrows so much from Achebe’s literary tradition. In other words, she has been greatly influenced by these writers. Roger Tro Deho defines influence as « une pénétration lente, une osmose subie de façon plus ou moins consciente par les écrivains. » (Deho, 2005: 104). Further, according to Pichois and Rousseau quoted by Deho,

les influences (...) peuvent être définies comme le mécanisme subtil et mystérieux par lequel une œuvre en engendre une autre (...) l’écrivain est susceptible de recevoir un stimuli créateur de l’admiration qu’il ressent pour un autre écrivain, mais plus encore du sentiment de parenté profonde, ou mieux d’une intimité personnelle particulière, qu’il a avec un autre écrivain....(Deho, 2005 :104)

Adichie and Achebe are bound by a kind of parental and spiritual relationship because Adichie grew up in Achebe’s house on Nsukka university campus. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the opening sentences remind the reader of his/her reading of late Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart*: “Things started to fall apart at home.” (Adichie, 2003:3). In the same vein, Roger J. Kurtz quoting Deji Toye (2005), says:

He observes that Adichie’s novel is an exploration of what he terms the “Okonkwo complex.” In Eugene, Adichie creates an Okonkwo figure, plopped down in a different era and facing different challenges to his worldview, but

<sup>12</sup> Rhode, Larissa. (2005). *The Network of Intertextual Relations in Naipaul’s Half of a Life and Magic Seeds*. rto Alegre: UFRGS, Instituto de Letras, Dissertação de Mestre em Letras na ênfase Literaturas de Língua Inglesa, p.59

<sup>13</sup> Adichie. “The Danger of a Single Story”, op.cit., p.1

clearly possessed of the same drive, the same mix of talents and shortcoming, and above all the same fundamental character flaw, which is that everything he does he must take to an extreme, with fatal consequences. (Kurtz, 2012:28).

Not only does the whole plot enlighten the reader on the life of an overzealous father and husband, Eugene Achike, but it also conveys the very image of a dictatorial father. Eugene and Okonkwo are representatives of the masculine ideologies since they rule their households with heavy hands. Although Eugene Achike and Okonkwo are portrayed in different novels, different times and settings, they are alike: "Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his children...." (Achebe, 1998:9) Like Okonkwo, Eugene rules his household with zero tolerance. In Eugene's household words are absent. His wife and children talk in whisper because he is the only one to be heard. The following passage denotes the prevailing atmosphere in his house:

We went upstairs to change, Jaja, Mama and I. Our steps on the stairs were as measured and as silent as our Sundays: the silence of waiting until Papa was done with his siesta so we could have lunch; the silence of reflection time, when Papa gave us a scripture passage or a book by one of the early church fathers to read and meditate on; the silence of evening rosary; the silence of driving to the church for benedictions afterwards. Even our family time on Sundays was quiet, without chess games or newspaper discussions, more in tune with the Day of Rest. (Adichie, 2003: 31)

The second motive is that Okonkwo and Eugene are driven by fear and hatred for their fathers. The narrator in *Things Fall Apart* reveals that Okonkwo's life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. In fact, this hails from his father's laziness and extreme gentleness whereas Eugene's disdain for his father originates from religion:

I didn't have a father who sent me to the best schools. My father spent his time worshipping gods of wood and stone. . I would be nothing today but for the priests and sisters at the mission. I was a houseboy for the parish for two years. Yes, a houseboy. Nobody dropped me off at school. I walked eight miles every day to Nimo until I finished elementary school. I was a gardener for the priests while I attended St Gregory Secondary School. (Adichie, 2003:47)

By examining and contrasting the origin of fear in both characters' life, Deji Toye (2005) finds out that both characters are alike as he writes:

Like Okonkwo, Eugene despises his father and dedicates his life to being as unlike him as possible. Like Okonkwo, Eugene finds success in his work, as a community leader, and as a man of many titles. But also like Okonkwo, Eugene, in his death, ironically ends up remarkably like the father whom he rejects. Okonkwo's tragedy is that the nature of his death makes him an outcast, stripped of titles and other symbols of all that he valued and lived for. Eugene likewise shuns his father and tries to isolate him as a "pagan," but in the end it is Eugene, poisoned by his own wife, who dies ignominiously and alone, without access to the sanctifying last rites of extreme unction that he considered so important. (Kurtz, 2012: 28)

Florence O. Orabueze in her 2004's article, "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*: An Allegorical Story of Man's Struggle for Freedom", concludes: "...while Okonkwo's fear arises out of the fact that he does not want to be seen as a weakling like his late father, Unoka, who could not provide for his family and died a debtor, Eugene Achike's fear

arises from a severe indoctrination from white missionaries. He does not want his family to be stained by any speck of sin..." (Orabueze, 2004:223). This allows me to compare Papa Nnukwu to Oduche's father, Ezeulu, in *Arrow of God*. Both old men are persuaded that children should learn the new ways of the white man. However, they do not think that their sons will use this against their community by turning down old values.

Eugene's severe indoctrination and misinterpretation of Christianity is similar to that of Joshua in Ngugi's *The River Between*. Joshua and Eugene behave as if they were mandated by the almighty God to execute his justice as Auntie Ifeoma laments: "O joka! Eugene has to stop doing God's job. God is big enough to do his own job..." (Adichie, 2003:95). On behalf of God, Eugene refuses to feed his father because he is a traditionalist; beats his daughter to death for breaking the Eucharistic fast, disfigures his son's fingers for failing two catechist questions. For God's sake, Joshua in *The River Between* looks down on circumcision as sinful while Eugene disregards traditional greeting as he says: "You did not bow to another human being. It was an ungodly tradition, bowing to an Igwe...." (Adichie, 2003:94). In addition, Eugene disregards the cultural festival of the *mmuo* and calls it devilish folklore.

As true African storytellers, Achebe and Adichie foresee the sad end of these men. In the two novels, the story of the tortoise, even though it has been told differently, shows that life on this earth requests neither too much cleverness nor selfishness. The tortoise in each of the story ends up having a crackled shell because he enjoys playing tricks. It is a kind way of teaching people that they cannot always be the winner. Sometimes, people must consent to lose and assume it. All these predictions come to be realised because Okonkwo ends up committing a crime, suicide, which is an abomination among the Igbo as it can be read: "It is against our custom, said one of the men. It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offense against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it." (Achebe, 1998:147). Similarly, Eugene is killed by his own wife. Suicide and murder are antagonistic tools against oppressors. Most of the time the former tool is that of the oppressed but when it happens to be used by the oppressor against him/herself it is a great sign of his/her actual weakness whereas the latter tool is used by the oppressed to gain victory over his/her oppressor. Both then point out the obvious weakness of a power drunk or extreme masculinity.

Among the Igbo, titles are important issues since they highlight the owner's achievement and prosperity on earth. Okonkwo and Eugene are two Igbo men having titles. Eugene is an Omelora, a man who does for his community while Okonkwo's nickname is "Roaring Flame" meaning "a living fire begets cold and important ash." (Achebe, 1998:109) This means that Okonkwo is going to be the cause of his own death. As for Eugene, unfortunately, his title is in stark contrast with her behaviour towards traditionalists that he calls pagans. Okonkwo and Eugene are bound by destiny because of their lack of acceptance of other people's religious and their overzealousness. They are neurotic and fanatic. In this vein, Anikwenwa, an old man of Eugene's father's generation predicts Eugene the same fate: "You are like a fly blindly following a corpse into the grave." (Adichie, 2003:70). As it can be expected, Okonkwo's and Eugene's lives end in a tragic manner. None of them enjoys the sanctifying rites of the religion that they have fought for during their lifetime at the end of each plot.

Another striking relation between the two male characters is their male offspring: Nwoye and Jaja. To some extent, Nwoye can be said to be a reincarnation of Eugene Achike in *Purple Hibiscus*. For instance, Mr. Kiaga and Father Benedict use similar statements to congratulate Nwoye or Eugene for their strong faith in the new God. In *Things Fall Apart*, Mr. Kiaga happily tells Nwoye the day he leaves definitely his father's home to live with the missionaries: "Blessed

is he who forsakes his father and his mother for my sake, he intoned. Those that bear my words are my father and my mother.” (Achebe, 1998:108). In *Purple Hibiscus*, Father Benedict says about Eugene while addressing the congregation on that Palm Sunday: “When we let our light shine before men, we are reflecting Christ’s Triumphant Entry....” (Adichie, 2003:4). It is as if the hypertext (*Purple Hibiscus*) was a continuation of the hypotext (*Things Fall apart*). This must not be read as a plagiarism. Instead, this transformation of the hypotext bears the signs of the hypertext’s originality. *Purple Hibiscus* both breaks the path with an old style of writing and at the same time draws much from it.

Like Ngugi and Achebe, Adichie satirises the clash of religions to enhance the need for inculturation. Achebe and Adichie successfully make the protagonists’ offspring’s defiance the turning point respectively in the novels. Both boys’ resiliency arises from similar though different circumstances. Nwoye upsets his father by joining the white missionaries and enrolls himself in the white school where he can learn how to read and write. The angered father would have killed his son if Uchendu had not intervened. As a punishment, Okonkwo bans Nwoye from his family because Nwoye has become an effeminate as it can be read:

You have all seen the great abomination of your brother. Now he is no longer my son or your brother. I will only have a son is a man, who will hold his head up among my people. If any one of you prefers to be a woman, let him follow Nwoye now while I am alive so that I can curse him. If you turn against me when I am dead, I will visit you and break your neck. (Achebe, 1998:121-122)

Like Nwoye, Jaja defies his father to put an end to yearly authoritarianism and chauvinism in the Achikes’ house. In order that his action should be praiseworthy, Adichie culminates it with the celebration of Palm Sunday. What does this really account for?

### **Purple Hibiscus and Palm Sunday**

Biblically, Palm Sunday– which is one of the twelve feasts of the Church year- began in Jerusalem, was commonly celebrated in the Eastern Church, and from then spread to the Western church between the sixth and seventh centuries, where it came to be known as Palm Sunday. Palms were used on Palm Sunday to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem as the Messiah-King of Israel. He had demonstrated his kingship by raising Lazarus from the dead. In fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, He entered Jerusalem, the City of the King, riding on an ‘ass colt’. He was greeted with palms and shouts of praise: Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The Son of David! The King of Israel! This celebration represents the symbols of Surrender, Allegiance and Victory.

Adichie draws a parallelism between this festival and the plot of the novel to announce the weaker’s struggle for freedom. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Jaja after a short stay in Nsukka and socialising around Father Amadi, an Igbo priest, who balances his native and foreign religions; Papa Nnukwu and Auntie Ifeoma and her children, defies his father. It happens on Palm Sunday when Jesus makes a triumphant entry to Jerusalem. Eugene flings his missal and this puts an end to a yearly masculine domination. Jaja’s defiance celebrates the victory of humility over extreme chauvinism and religious indoctrination. Auntie Ifeoma concludes that “Being defiant can be a good thing sometimes.... Defiance is like marijuana-it is not a bad thing when it is used right.” (Adichie, 2003:144). It also symbolises the victory of inculturation as this passage shows it: “Auntie Ifeoma was silent... then she looked up and said Papa Nnukwu was not a heathen but a traditionalist, that sometimes what was different was just as good as what was familiar, that when Papa-Nnukwu did his itu-nzu, his declaration of innocence, in the morning, it was the same as our saying the rosary...” (Adichie, 2003: 166)

Adichie's mastery and appropriation of literary aesthetics opens new room to African literature criticism. Basically, her style launches the emergence of a new generation of women writers. Their characters whatever the sex make an adverse critique of African political history. By the token intertextuality, Adichie voices women's absence in the public sphere because history is still a male prerogative. Women's struggle for the total liberation of their country is deliberately silenced. In short, Adichie's style proves that the latest generation of women writers does not use a feminist language. Instead, this new generation is just reflecting women's actual place in their societies.

## CONCLUSIONS

Genette's first and fourth intertextual relations, intertextuality and hypertextuality, epitomize Adichie's great mastery of creative writing as a weapon to document history and postcolonial woes in her country. More particularly, in *Purple Hibiscus*, the narrator uses allusions and parody, first, to satirise the religious hypocrisy of the overzealous African Christians like Eugene who misinterprets Christian doctrine. In regard to Eugene, he is a typical African believer; his public life is the most recommended though in stark contrast to his private life. There is indeed a big and wide gap between theory and practice in regard with Eugene's behaviour. Second, allusions unveil the darkest period of Nigeria through the draconian ruling of late Abacha. As devices, allusions offer Adichie the opportunity to put into the fabric of the novel two antagonist figures of Nigeria's political history in the nineties: Moshood and Abacha. The parallelism of their death stands for a beginning of a new era in Nigeria. In addition, her debut novel pays tribute to some well known African writers; an evidence of her connection to an elder generation. Her message is clearer: no one can survive in this world if he/she does not permanently build a bridge between the past and the present. As a family saga, *Purple Hibiscus*, parodies the triumph of the weaker over the dictators and oppressors.

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